

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material wherein (1) at least one silk protein substance selected from the group consisting of silk proteins and partial hydrolyzates of silk proteins and (2) a softening agent has been applied to a surface portion of one or both napped faces thereof is provided with (1) at least one silk protein substance selected from the group consisting of silk proteins and partial hydrolyzates of silk proteins and (2) a softening agent.

Claim 2 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 1, wherein a portion below the surface portion, free of the silk protein substance and softening agent, occurs as a layer in a the vicinity of the middle portion ~~of the sheet~~ in a direction of thickness of the sheet material.

Claim 3 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the silk protein substance comprises at least one substance selected from the group consisting of silk fibroin solubilized in water and water-soluble partial hydrolyzates of silk fibroin.

Claim 4 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 2, wherein the silk protein substance comprises at least one substance selected from the group consisting of silk fibroin solubilized in water and water-soluble partial hydrolyzates of silk fibroin.

Claim 5 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the ratio by mass of the silk protein substance to the softening agent, applied to the napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material, is 20:80 to 70:30.

Claim 6 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 2, wherein the ratio by mass of the silk protein substance to the softening agent, applied to the napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material, is 20:80 to 70:30.

Claim 7 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 3, wherein the ratio by mass of the silk protein substance to the softening agent, applied to the napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material, is 20:80 to 70:30.

Claim 8 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 4, wherein the ratio by mass of the silk protein substance to the softening agent, applied to the napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material, is 20:80 to 70:30.

Claim 9 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 1, wherein, based on the basis weight (A) (g/m^2) of the napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material before being provided with the silk protein substance and softening agent, the silk protein substance is applied in an amount of $0.0005A$ to $0.025A$ (g/m^2) and the softening agent in an amount of $0.001A$ to $0.1A$ (g/m^2).

Claim 10 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the nap-forming fibers comprise ultrafine fibers, which ultrafine fibers comprise entangled nonwoven fabric containing an elastomer therein.

Claim 11 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in ~~Claims~~ Claim10, wherein the ultrafine fibers are obtained by removing a sea component from fibers having a sea-island structure as obtained by the mixed spinning or composite spinning technique and wherein the ultrafine fibers are substantially free from adhesion to the elastomer in the napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material.

Claim 12 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 10, wherein the ultrafine fibers have a single fiber fineness of not more than 0.5 decitex.

Claim 13 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 10, wherein the ratio by mass of the ultrafine fibers to the elastomer is 30/70 to 95/5.

Claim 14 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the softening agent is a silicone softening agent.

Claim 15 (Currently Amended): The napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the softening agent is a polyamide softening agent.

Claim 16 (Currently Amended): A method of producing napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet materials which comprises applying (a) a liquid containing (1) a silk protein substance selected from the group consisting of silk proteins and partial hydrolyzates of silk proteins, and (2) a softening agent, or (b) applying a liquid containing said silk protein substance and a liquid containing a softening agent simultaneously or separately, to the napped surface(s) of a napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material comprising an entangled nonwoven fabric comprising ultrafine fibers and an elastomer contained therein and having a nap made of ultrafine fibers on one or both sides thereof.

Claim 17 (Currently Amended): The method of producing napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet materials as claimed in Claim 16, wherein the applying is carried out by a gravure printing technique or spraying technique.

Claim 18 (Currently Amended): An article of clothing produced from a napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 1.

Claim 19 (Currently Amended): An article of clothing produced from a napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 2.

Claim 20 (Currently Amended): An article of clothing produced from a napped ~~leather-like~~ artificial leather sheet material as claimed in Claim 3.

DICUSSION OF THE AMENDMENT

The term “leather-like” has been replaced with –artificial leather—in all applicable claims, as supported in the specification at page 1, line 8. No change in claim scope is intended or effected.

Claim 1 has been further amended by rearranging clauses, and replacing, in effect, “is provided with” with --has been applied to--, as supported, for example, by Claim 16.

Finally, Claim 2 has been further amended, as supported in the specification at page 10, lines 11-31.

No new matter has been added by the above amendment. Claims 1-20 remain pending in the application.